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Contents

Focus: Humanism
Schwerpunkt: Humanismus

Articles / Beiträge

Technology and Childhood

On a Double Debt of the Human

by

Gert-Jan van der Heiden (Radboud University)

If we raise the question of humanism today, we encounter a number of prefixes indicating that we are moving away from humanism. Prefixes such as anti-, post-, and trans- (and we may perhaps also add the prefix in- as in the inhuman) determine a large number of the reflections on humanism today, and especially those reflections indebted to Martin Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*. For Heidegger, it is the definition of the human being as *animal rationale* that is the point of departure for humanism and that, therefore, marks the problematic status of humanism since the human is more than this definition allows us to think*: Das Wesen des Menschen besteht aber darin, daß er mehr ist als der bloße Mensch, insofern dieser als das vernünftige Lebewesen vorgestellt wird*.[1]

This latter sentence also exemplifies the problem we encounter when trying to "overcome" humanism: although the sense of what is human as developed in humanism and metaphysics is criticized, it is done so in light of another sense of the human, here described as the essence of the human being (*das Wesen des Menschen*). It is for this reason that Heidegger briefly plays with the idea whether this other sense of the human may not guide a reinterpretation of the word "humanism" and whether it is not possible *dem Wort Humanismus einen geschichtlichen Sinn zurückzugeben, der älter ist als sein historisch gerechnet ältester.*[2] Yet, he dismisses this option since it would give rise to *einen "Humanismus" seltsamer Art*, a too singular "humanism".[3] Instead, he suggests *durch einen offenen Widerstand gegen den ‚Humanismus' einen*

[1] Martin Heidegger, Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe Band 9, Frankfurt am Main 1976, p. 342.
[2] Heidegger, Wegmarken, p. 345.
[3] Heidegger, Wegmarken, p. 345.

Anstoß zu wagen.[4] I will take the two words he uses in this sentence, *Anstoß* and *wagen*, as the guideline to a reflection on what, after Heidegger and in the wake of Heidegger's critique of humanism, a reflection on the human may have in store for us. The word *Anstoß* means both offense and thrust or push, an ambiguity which in the English translation is captured by the word "shock", and it is this *Anstoß* that thinking has to risk in its reflection on the essence of the human being.

In his subsequent account of the nature of this reflection, Heidegger seems to suggest that this ambiguity of the shock one needs to risk in thinking the human is regulated by a clear economy. On the one hand, there are simple "misinterpretations" (*Mißdeutungen*) of the nature of this reflection that mistake the open resistance to humanism for eine *Verteidigung des Inhumanen und eine Verherrlichung der barbarischen Brutalität*.[5] This, so it seems in these pages of the *Letter on "Humanism"*, is the offense this reflection may cause: a defense of the inhuman, of a certain form of inhumanity that is further explicated by the word "barbaric", which is derived from the Greek βάρβαρος, the crude human being who does not possess the Greek λόγος. Yet, as he insists, this is a mere misinterpretation of the nature of this reflection. On the other hand, Heidegger argues that this resistance allows for the shock that pushes thinking into *eine Besinnung* […] *die* […] *auf die Dimension denkt, in der das Wesen des Menschen, vom Sein her bestimmt, heimisch ist*.[6] Hence, the non-misunderstanding, the proper understanding of this reflection arises when we see that this other thought of the human enters a zone in which the essence of the human being is at home. Thinking requires such a shock that allows it to enter a realm that shelters the essence of the human and that is proper to the human being.

In what follows, I will show how the very ambiguity of both the *Anstoß* and the *Wagnis* marks the reflections on the human after Heidegger, but I will add that this ambiguity is not regulated by the economy Heidegger imposes on it. To a certain extent, this problematization of the aforementioned economy is already at work in Heidegger's thought: when the human being is to be understood neither as *animal rationale* nor as ζῷον λόγον ἔχον, the "essence" of the human will have to involve the element of the barbaric, of the βάρβαρος, of what lacks a Greek λόγος. The *Anstoß* is in the first place an offence to the dignity of the human being that is found in human rationality, in human having language, both from

[4] Heidegger, Wegmarken, p. 346. For the English translation see Martin Heidegger, Pathmarks, edited by William McNeill, Cambridge / New York 1998, p. 263.

[5] Heidegger, Wegmarken, p. 346.

[6] Heidegger, Wegmarken, p. 346.

a theoretical and a practical concern, i.e. both in the human capacity to discern in science and technology the blossoming of its humanity as well as in the human capacity to speak and to act. In addition, one needs to think how this λόγος then comes to supplement this barbaric dimension of the human. It also remains to be seen to what extent this element of the βάρβαρος can be understood in terms of "brutality", which is of the brute, the animal, and more specifically the powers the animals demonstrate and that in the word brutality comes to mean a certain cruel and crude abuse of powers. (In this latter sense, animality and brutality have lost their kinship since only the human being seems to be able to demonstrate brutality in its exemplary form.)

To elaborate these lines of thought, I want to trace two developments, arising in discussion with Heidegger's concerns with respect to humanism, that each in its own way adopts Heidegger's challenge and shows how the ambiguity of the *Anstoß* and the *Wagnis* do return in an understanding of the human (and in the inhuman). This ambiguity will be explained in terms of a double provenance or a double debt of the human which renders the human, from its very origin, double faced. I will elaborate this claim in discussion with two authors (although others could have been chosen), namely Bernard Stiegler, a prolific student of Jacques Derrida who concentrates on the problem of technology, and Jean-François Lyotard and his reflections on *enfance* or childhood. I've chosen these two since their works on the human and the double debt of the human are in a precise sense of the word complementary, as I aim to show in what follows.

1. Τέχνη and the Birth of Humankind

The themes of anti-humanism, post-humanism or trans-humanism often include reflections on the role of science and technology for the constitution of the human being. In particular, these non-humanisms often aim to understand the end of the human being brought about by technology: the human is taken up in a thoroughly technological process that substitutes or ends the human. Stiegler's work on technics and technology departs from this present-day interest in the end of the human. Yet, as he argues, rather than merely considering the implications and presuppositions of this thought of the ends of the human, one should first inquire into the constitutive relation between humans and technics – a relation that precedes the birth of the human, as Stiegler notes when characterizing the central tenet of his work:

We are considering a passage: the passage to what is called the human. Its "birth," if there is one. Why should we question the "birth" of the human? First of all because we have unceasingly, since Hegel, questioned its end.[7]

Hence, according to Stiegler, a proper analysis of the end(s) of the human should be supported by and understood out of a conception of the *beginning* of the human, the very *birth* of humankind. The story of the birth of humankind is a story of technics or technology. In the first volume of *Technics and Time*, Stiegler offers the philosophical framework for this story, which he also finds exemplified in the story of the birth of humankind as told in Plato's *Protagoras*.[8] The main thesis of *Technics and Time* can be phrased in terms of this story, as is also indicated by this book's subtitle: *The Fault of Epimetheus*. Let me first retell this story in my own register and subsequently turn to Stiegler's understanding of it.

Protagoras narrates the fable of the creation of mortal beings. After the gods have molded the mortal beings in earth (but before these beings are brought to light), they assign Prometheus and Epimetheus with a particular task, namely to give to each species the particular powers or capacities (δύναμις) that belong to them so that they are able to survive. One might interpret the necessity of this task as follows: apparently, each of these mortal beings has an innate care for its own being, and it is the task of the two titans to grant to these beings the powers proper to their survival and their safeguarding – and this means the powers that are proper for them to their take care of their own being, otherwise they are left powerless.

Epimetheus asks Prometheus whether he, Epimetheus, can do the dealing himself so that Prometheus can check afterwards whether the capacities were distributed well. When handing out the capacities to each of the species, Epimetheus forgets one of them: humankind. "Now Epimetheus […] heedlessly squandered his stock of properties on the brutes; he had still left unequipped the race of men, and was at a loss what to do with it"[9] Although the day of their emergence from the earth – their being brought to light, their birth – had already come, humankind did not yet receive any powers to care for its own being. At this point, the story marks a fundamental difference between the human and the brutes, the ἄλογα, in that the former lacks

[7] Bernard Stiegler, Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus, translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford 1998, p. 135.

[8] Stiegler, Technics and Time, 1, pp. 183–203. Plato, Protagoras 320 c–322 d. Protagoras offers the choice of a μῦθος or a λόγος, and since everybody urges him to proceed in the way he pleases, he notes that probably the more agreeable way is to tell the story (320 c).

[9] Plato, Protagoras, 321 c.

any proper powers for sustaining its life. The fault (*faute*) of Epimetheus thus constitutes the original lack or defect (*défaut*) of the human being.

When Prometheus comes and examines how Epimetheus fulfilled the task assigned to them, he finds the brutes well taken care of, but the humans "naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed". It is as if with these words, the story describes the human at its birth: naked, without protection, without natural resting place, without any powers or capacities to safeguard its existence. Prometheus finds himself in perplexity, ἀπορία, of what powers may serve as preservation or salvation, σωτηρίαν, of humankind.[10] The human thus confronts the titan with a second task, namely to compensate for Epimetheus' fault and to supplement human powerlessness. The fulfillment of this second task, as Stiegler points out, gives rise to the second fault at the heart of human existence: to offer humans the means to protect and save themselves, Prometheus steals fire and arts (τέχνη) from Hephaistos and Athena and gives them to the humans; this Prometheus εὐπορία out of the ἀπορία in which he finds himself.[11] Whereas the brutes are the ἄλογα, it is thanks to the skills and arts received from Prometheus that humankind develops φωνή and ὀνόματα, voice and words, that is, language. Language as the defining characteristic of humankind is thus due to the divine arts granted to humans and is not proper to human – once again, one may interpret this as a description of human childhood: none of the human languages are naturally given, but the child has to develop its voice and its words and usually learns, in time, to speak one or some of the many human languages that exist.

The divine arts that supplement the lack of proper human powers or abilities constitutes the ambiguity and the particular risk of the human: naked, but clothing itself with divine means and offered the gift of fire that gives wealth, it can also destroy the very civilization it helped to build up. It is in light of this risk at stake in the arts that Prometheus stole for the humans that Zeus assigns Hermes with the task of giving to all humans another supplement and another τέχνη, namely the civic or political art, πολιτική τέχνη[12]. It is only by the gifts of δίκη and αἰδώς that humans may negotiate with the dangers of the arts in the complexity of civic and social life, allowing humans to constitute communities and political bonds which they need for their survival.

What does this story mean for Stiegler? According to him, it basically tells us that humankind depends on technics and technology from before its birth – the supplementary structure of the human marks that humankind is

[10] Plato, Protagoras, 321 c–d.
[11] Plato, Protagoras, 322 a.
[12] Plato, Protagoras, 322 c–d.

not its own but is rather a product, produced by and constituted by technics. It is in this sense that terms such as post-humanism are premature since if the human of humanism is understood as a human before any contamination or supplementation with technics, humanism simply does not exist: from its very inception, humankind depends on technics. One might perhaps say that at this point Stiegler restates Hannah Arendt's famous description of the human being as a conditioned being, privileging the condition of technics:

> Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence. […] Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence.[13]

According to Stiegler, this conditioned nature of the human extends also to the human capacity to speak and to act: these capacities are not simply, originally or properly human but depend on the gift of arts and fire, on those skills that allowed the human to develop voice and words. This means that they are capacities that are not simply granted to humans from the very beginning, but need to be developed, need to be taught, and require the very human institutions in which they subsequently appear. In this sense, even the voice of an individual is not simply something utterly new, but always marked by the shared language into which the child is introduced by his or her education.

Departing from this basic insight, a whole field of philosophical inquiries into the role and importance of technology for the human opens up. It is not my aim to go into that direction but rather to use this form of non-humanism (which in certain way is exemplary for the forms of non-humanism that nowadays arise out of a philosophical reflection on technology and its societal role) in order to outline the understanding of the human to which Stiegler's reading guides him.

The description of the human as an animal with τέχνη is, at first sight, not in itself at odds with the definition of the human as *animal rationale* or ζῷον λόγον ἔχον. After all, the human voice (φωνή) and the human words (ὀνόματα) are understood as the first consequences of the skills (τέχνη) granted to the human. In this sense, λόγος does name the singularity of the human amidst the other mortal creatures (who are the ἄλογα).[14] Yet, to understand how Stiegler puts this classical understanding of the human upside down, it is important to hear the Derridean key in which he reads these passages when emphasizing the *supplementary* character of technology. None of the creatures are finished when being molded in earth. Yet, whereas the

[13] Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Chicago 1998, p. 9.
[14] Plato, Protagoras 321 c; see Stiegler, Time and Technics, 1, p. 195.

incompleteness of the other mortal creatures is completed by powers that befit mortal creatures – having fur to protect them from the cold, having the capacity to outrun their natural opponents, having the strength to gather their food, and so on; all these powers are in accordance with the divine process of passing out mortal capacities to the mortals – the incompleteness of the humans is not completed but rather supplemented by arts powers that only befit the immortals. Therefore, the incompleteness of the molded forms – the pre-human forms that will be brought to existence – gets a different meaning in the human being: it becomes, in Stiegler's formulation, a *défaut*, a lack or defect. Rather than accounting for this lack as a mere lack, a mere void it might be more telling to understand this lack in terms of a desire or a propensity: the human is the being that *desires* possibilities, potentialities, powers, and capacities and moves towards gaining them (the whole range of meanings of the Greek δύναμις may be brought into play here).[15] This means also that the human is, from its birth, in a struggle to attain powers and is in a certain sense powerless; therefore, it requires the arts that allow the human, by means of a supplement to and never by a fulfillment of this desire, to acquire certain powers and capacities.[16] Thus, the birth of the human involves a twofold non-human: a lack as a desire for capacities and the stolen, divine arts that supplement this lack. Since the supplement does not complete or fulfill this desire, humankind derives from a mismatch: harmony between the two non-human parts can never be attained.

On the one hand, the divine arts stretch the human beyond itself. As Stiegler argues, following Jacques Derrida, they are characteristically a φάρμακον: a gift and a medicine for the human being as well as a possible poison or threat to human; as he notes with regard to Prometheus' gift of fire: "Fire is the *pharmakon* par excellence. As civilizing process, it is constantly at risk of setting fire to civilization."[17] Or, in the terminology used in *Technics and Time 1*, the τέχναι are supplements, and they are constitutive of λόγος. Hence, in this reading, the notion of τέχνη complicates the definition of the human by indicating a certain rift between ζωή and λόγος. The supplement, which is a φάρμακον, constitutes the risk that the human is – a

[15] This particular comment moves beyond Stiegler's account since for him the structure of desire in the human is also constituted and directed by technics.

[16] One might be inclined to add here a reflection on Plato's use of παιδεία which always requires another for the education – even in the parable of the cave, the ability to get out of the cave is not natural or innate but requires the help of those who went outside before.

[17] For the importance of the pharmakon and of technology as pharmacology, see e.g. Bernard Stiegler, What Makes Life Worth Living, On Pharmacology, Polity Press 2013, p. 24.

risk both the titans and the gods are willing to take since it seems to be the only way to grant humankind the powers to survive. In this sense, the supplement is both the human risk and the human chance.

On the other hand, to prepare turning to Lyotard, the human lack is constitutive of the human precisely because the powers granted to the human are not completing the human but, as supplement, leave a certain room for play or for *différance* between the folded molded in earth and the powers or capacities awarded to it to survive. This human void, lack or defect (*défaut*) is, as Stiegler shows in a repetition of an argument of Derrida's, only traceable; it is only given in the traces it leaves: the constitutive lack can only be touched in and by a certain technical, grammatical mediation. In terms of the myth, one could say that this void or defect is the very human weakness that manifests itself as the incapacity to persist in existence: the human "was naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed".[18] Yet is it enough to describe this constitutive, human weakness as a lack, as something taken up by and in the process of supplementation? Is there not a more basic meaning to be granted to the constitutive weakness of human birth? Put differently, if humankind borrows the capacities of the gods, what happens to its own, pre-human incapacity that it carries in itself and that is the very condition of its particular birth?[19] It is at this point that I would like to bring another perspective into play, one which in certain respects doubles the problematic of Stiegler, with, perhaps, less attention to the different layers of technical supplementarity, but also with a keener sense for the meaning of this human incapacity itself, for that which in the human precedes the human λόγος, the human voice and human words.

2. *Enfance* or the Human that Cannot Speak

The work of Lyotard offers a different interpretation of the ambiguity of the human, i.e., the twofold dimension of the non-human that constitutes the human being as we discussed it above. It is especially the dimension of the constitutive defect of the human – that which needs to be repaired and

[18] Plato, Protagoras, 321 c.

[19] Note that in Jean-Pierre Vernant, Myth and Thought among the Greeks, New York 2006, p. 266, it is mentioned that Prometheus' theft introduces birth through procreation. The figure of Prometheus, of course, is often referred to in relation to the human capacities of technology and the implied mastery of the world. One might understand Stiegler's reinterpretation of the story of Prometheus in line with a certain suspicion with respect to the gift of technology. For a clear overview of the different aspects of the Prometheus-myth, see Samuel IJsseling, Apollo, Dionysos, Aphrodite en de anderen, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 149–173.

supplemented by τέχνη, as Stiegler suggests – that is the point of departure for Lyotard's critique of humanism. To understand what happens in the transition from Stiegler to Lyotard, one should first account for the particular change of perspective that takes place in this transition, and this change concerns first and foremost the role of technics and technology. Whereas Stiegler addresses this theme in the context of the above considerations on the birth of humankind to understand the basic and primary relation of technics to humanity, Lyotard addresses this theme in relation to the question of the role of technology and the institutions in society today, i.e., the time and period that has given rise to thinking the end or the ends of humankind. And, as one should immediately add, it is not only Lyotard but also Stiegler, in other texts and contexts, who offers an intriguing and pressing analysis of the role of technology in society today. In fact, when it comes to this present-day role of technology, there is a fundamental agreement between Stiegler and Lyotard concerning one aspect of the complexity of the contemporary world. Despite Stiegler's insistence on the technical "nature" of the human – the indispensable prosthesis or supplement of τέχνη for the human – the technological developments in present-day society are of such an enormous speed that humans and human institutions lack the capacity to reflect these developments in the societal structure and thus to find a proper way of dealing with these developments. The speed of these technological developments, as Stiegler argues, leads to a fundamental societal disorientation or disaster due to "an illimitation of technics, in which the nature of humanity is thereby threatened by its own power *qua* technics".[20] In this period, the φάρμακον of technics shows its poisonous side more clearly than ever: what saved human existence at its birth according to the Platonic myth, now threatens this existence. More than ever, to put it in different terms, technics and technology as well as the way they inform and structure society, have a dehumanizing effect. In this way, they produce another offence to the human, one might say. If one follows Stiegler's analysis at these points, we see that the *Anstoß* and the fear of barbaric brutalities of which Heidegger speaks, might indeed belong to the nature of the human, especially the human as the being whose essence is to risk and to be a risk exactly in his relation to τέχνη.

Unlike Stiegler, who offers an analysis not only of technology in terms of its present-day disorienting effect but also of the intrinsic connectedness of humanity to technology, Lyotard's reflections depart from the current state of affairs. In the highly intriguing introductory chapter of the book entitled *The Inhuman* (an introduction which perhaps tells us more about the inhu-

[20] Cf. Stiegler, Technics and Time, 1, p. 92.

man than the rest of the book), Lyotard writes that the essays collected in this volume "betray" a particular "suspicion" that, as he writes,

> is simple, though double: what if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman (that's the first part)? And (the second part), what if what is "proper" to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?[21]

In this dense quote, Lyotard distinguishes two forms of inhuman (to which also two forms of the human or of humanity correspond, as we shall see). The first form of the inhuman, namely the one human beings are "becoming," is Lyotard's version of what Stiegler refers to by the words "disorientation" and "disaster". If one follows the terminology and the references these two authors offer, it is immediately clear that in both cases, Heidegger's reflections on technology and *Gestell* are a fundamental source of inspiration to them (e.g., Stiegler writes that "technics [is] understood today as "system", […] *Gestell*"), but also the influence of Maurice Blanchot elucidates the similar gesture one finds in the works of these authors. Stiegler refers to Blanchot when speaking of the "becoming-astral" of the human, which in fact is nothing but Blanchot's version of Lyotard's "becoming inhuman".[22] Blanchot's explication of his reference to the stars (in the becoming-astral and the "astral era") also resonates with Heidegger's reflections on technology. Consider the following words by Blanchot:

> For the latter [i.e., modern technology] includes collective organization on a planetary scale for the purpose of establishing calculated planning, mechanization and automation, and, finally, atomic energy – a key term. What up to now only the stars could do, man does.[23]

What at first may sound as an exaltation of the human – humankind has become like the stars – turns out to be an unlimited multiplication of the risk that the human presents. Moreover – or perhaps by consequence – this becoming-a-star leads to a dehumanization of the world brought about by the powers that were first given to the human for survival.

Confronted with such an account – and the doom scenarios of which they seem to be composed – the question arises of where an alternative is to be found; which of the human powers is capable of offering a way out of these scenarios. It is at this point that the analyses of Stiegler and Lyotard go separate ways – at least up to a certain degree, as I will explain below. In his recent *What Makes Life Worth Living*, it becomes clear how Stiegler will

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[21] Jean-François Lyotard, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, tr. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Cambridge 1998, p. 2.

[22] Stiegler, Technics and Time, 1, pp. 91–92.

[23] Maurice Blanchot, The Infinite Conversation, tr. by Susan Hanson, Minneapolis, MN 1992, p. 266. See also Stiegler, Technics and Time, 1, p. 89.

attempt to solve this contemporary crisis of technology – or rather where he finds the possible resources of such a solution. These resources are found in the very pharmacological nature of technics. Whereas contemporary developments in technology show stronger than ever before the poisonous side of the φάρμακον that τέχνη is, this does not efface its medicinal side. One might say that technics becomes differentiated in itself and that technics need to be developed that supplement the disorienting technics (which dehumanize and which offer no place for a human life and relation to it) and that will form the medium for a societal transition towards a situation in which the new technical developments offer a space to live in. Stiegler opts here for a differentation of the τέχναι that runs parallel to the one announced in the Platonic myth: the stolen arts and fire do not lead to human survival, but rather to humans doing wrong to other humans and thus to the further dissolution of humankind,[24] therefore Zeus offers another τέχνη, the πολιτική τέχνη, to moderate the disastrous effects of the stolen arts so that humankind can take care of itself. When Stiegler argues that it is technics itself that should find the means to live with the newly developed technics, he brings into play a similar πολιτική τέχνη which extends to a πόλις in which one learns how to live with technics. Although this differentiation is inescapable – if human powers are the only resource to deal with the disorientation, the only possible way out of this disorientation is to be found in technics – it is at the same time highly doubtful whether one can truly think such a differentiation in terms of the Derridean notion of φάρμακον: after all, this notion implies that the poisonous dimension itself cannot be separated from its medicinal dimension. To put it differently, for Derrida, the notion of φάρμακον was introduced to problematize the distinction between good and bad writing, whereas Stiegler uses the same notion to distinguish between good and bad technics, disorienting and orienting technologies, threatening and saving technics.[25] Therefore, it remains to be seen whether Stiegler's approach here does not require another source to account for this differentiation.[26]

With regard to this aporia, Lyotard offers another passageway out. Recall that in the brief quote above, he distinguishes between two forms of the inhuman, of which we explained only the first one. In order to address another source to account for the type of differentiation Stiegler aims for,

[24] Plato, Protagoras, 322 c.

[25] Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, tr. by Barbara Johnson, Chicago 1981, p. 149.

[26] The myth is quite clear about this question and about this other source: Zeus rather than Prometheus, and the gods rather than the titans, offer the means to deal with the divine arts. Yet this solution might, of course, be interpreted as a metaphysical gesture in which the father-God is the measure of the distinction that is needed here.

Lyotard refers us to the second form of the inhuman, the one by which humankind "were to be inhabited". To capture where this "familiar and unknown guest" of the human is to be found, he refers to the exemplary example of education, an example which, as he writes is also "accessible to humanists".[27] Humans are not born human, Lyotard continues, since otherwise they would not need to be educated. Stiegler's story on the τέχναι given to humankind as a supplement to humans' native lack is mirrored in Lyotard's comments on education and on the institutions that make up human society; education allows the uneducated child to enter civilization. Education, *Bildung*, or παιδεία, so central to humanist concerns, use a certain potentiality of the human child, but they use a potentiality that the human child cannot actualize by him or herself. As in the parable of the cave, when the prisoner is freed for the first time, he lacks the capacities to go out into the sun – only when he is forced by others who already have learnt to walk in the sunlight, the prisoner may be brought to the freedom Socrates envisions here. Education is a similar process in which the potentialities of the child are forced in a certain direction so that the child may find a life in the institutions that constitute his or her society. The native lack of civilization (as a product of the τέχναι) is thus supplemented by education, as Lyotard writes: "The institutions which constitute culture supplement this native lack."[28] He continues by posing the following two fundamental questions:

> What shall we call human in humans, the initial misery of their childhood [*enfance*], or their capacity to acquire a "second" nature which, thanks to language, makes them fit to share in communal life, adult consciousness and reason? That the second depends on and presupposes the first is agreed by everyone. The question is only that of knowing whether this dialectic, whatever name we grace it with, leaves no remainder (*reste*).[29]

If a distinction is needed to confront the disaster of which both Stiegler and Lyotard write, and if this distinction is to be thought out of a non-metaphysical schema that privileges the one, and if the notion of φάρμακον as Stiegler thinks it does not offer the means to truly think this distinction, the best way to proceed might be to insist, as Lyotard does here, on the two humans (and the two forms of the inhuman) that are at stake in the human being. Since if there are two, there is at least a distinction.

Let us see how Lyotard proceeds in the above quote and how he accounts for the role of the native lack of the human. According to him there is a remainder or a reserve of human childhood that is not fully transformed

[27] Lyotard, The Inhuman, pp. 2–3.
[28] Lyotard, The Inhuman, p. 3.
[29] Lyotard, The Inhuman, p. 3.

into culture's second nature. This remainder, as Lyotard continues, explains why there is a constant "struggle" of the individual to "assure his or her conformity to the institutions" as well as for "the power of criticizing them". Childhood or *enfance* thus refers to the child's potentiality as a potentiality exceeding the actualization that education offers. This excessive dimension of the child's potentiality remains in the adult. This excessive dimension is noticed first and foremost as a particular form of impotentiality the adult feels with respect to the institutions: the adult cannot naturally conform to the institutions. Or, as Lyotard writes in the same context, this remaining potentiality or this reserve is present in the experience of "the pain of supporting them [i.e., the institutions]" as well as in "the temptation to escape them." These descriptions each indicate that the human does not coincide with the second nature that education, *Bildung* and παιδεία have bestowed upon him or her. In this sense, as the particular impotentiality (ἀδυναμία) to identify with the given τέχναι and the given education, the native lack of childhood is still at work after our *Bildung*. This native impotentiality or weakness thus generates in adult life a particular *reserve* with respect to the institutions, technologies, and their powers. Reserve is meant here in the double sense of (1) what is held in reserve, namely a hidden potentiality to criticize or a "temptation to escape the institutions," and (2) of a certain reservation in the human with respect to this actualization of education, expressed here in the pain of supporting the institutions or the struggle to conform to them.

It is intriguing that Lyotard names this constitutive lack childhood or rather infancy, *enfance*, that which cannot (yet) speak. Hence, the inhuman that inhabits the human concerns a realm in the human that precedes the λόγος, the human voice and human words, which after all result from the skill Prometheus offered to humankind. As Giorgio Agamben reminds us when developing a similar concept of *enfance* as Lyotard, the infant's incapacity to speak is not a mere lack, but rather the potentiality to speak *all* languages – a potentiality which can never be actualized.[30] This means also that in a certain sense this potentiality exceeds the languages that the child actually learns to speak. This surplus in the child's *misère*, in the child's incapacity to speak, survives in the adult – at least this is what Lyotard claims. Consequently, since the education of the child is not without remainder, the definition of the human as ζῷον λόγον ἔχον does not capture this very remainder that co-constitutes the human and that implies a rift between ζωή and λόγος, but this time this rift is not only thematized in terms of λόγος as

[30] Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience, tr. by Liz Heron, London / New York 1993, pp. 55–56.

τέχνη, but also in the constitutive δύναμις / ἀδυναμία of this other form of ἄλογος, i.e., not the one of the animals that lack the potentiality to speak human languages, but the ἄλογος or the βάρβαρος of the infant.

It is this descending of the human that inspires Lyotard to suggest that, rather than taking "pride in the title of humanity" because of the human capacity to become a star, "one can take pride in the title of humanity for exactly the opposite reasons," and he continues with the following description of the child:

> Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of its interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible. Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human.[31]

To avoid any misunderstandings, let me emphasize that Lyotard insists that one cannot simply choose between the two versions of "humanism" sketched here – the humanism of the human institutions, of education, *Bildung*, παιδεία, technology, science or the humanism of the infant. In this sense, he strongly opposes definitions, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's, in which the human turns out to have no defining properties at all. The human is rather, for Lyotard as well as for Stiegler, this very ambiguity itself: of institution *and* infant. These two elements are never taken up in "a well-ordered dialectic"; they remain a mismatch. Moreover, by insisting on this two-faced-ness of the human, Lyotard also claims that both sides of the human can turn inhuman: we have already discussed in which sense the institutions may become inhuman, and we may add that there is no education without limiting the realm of possibilities lying ready in *enfance*; yet, another danger can be found in the dimension of the infant, since in relation to the institutions this impotentiality to identify with them can give rise to "an inhuman power of deregulation."

Nevertheless, despite this symmetry between both sides of the human, it is clear that for Lyotard, in the present-day situation marked by what he calls a "transformation of the nature of the system" (i.e., Stiegler's disorientation and Heidegger's *Gestell*) that the task of philosophy is in the first place to draw attention to childhood, to this originary poverty and weakness of the human. Interestingly enough, in a terminology that he, once again, shares with Stiegler and which both borrow from Heidegger, Lyotard interprets our relation to our childhood as a debt:

[31] Lyotard, The Inhuman, pp. 3–4.

And what else is left to resist with but the debt which each soul has contracted with the miserable and admirable indetermination from which it was born and does not cease to be born? […] This debt to childhood [*enfance*] is one which we never pay off. […] It is the task of writing, thinking, literature, arts, to venture to bear witness to it.[32]

The difference and the affinity between Lyotard and Stiegler is once more affirmed by this notion of debt, as a reinterpretation of Heidegger's *Schuldigsein*.[33] For Stiegler, human's being-at-fault, as he translates *Schuldigsein* in order to capture the play of words with the notion of *dé-faut* and the double *fault* (of, first, Epimetheus' forgetting and, subsequently, Prometheus' theft), positions the debt in the first place in a *forgetting* of the human poverty and subsequently to the stolen supplement that is introduced to compensate for this forgetting. Yet, what Stiegler does not do, is trying to think the indebtedness of the human to this "poverty or misery" itself which is not only that which is in need of a supplement, but is also the source of resistance to each of the gifts of arts and fire.[34] Whereas for Stiegler, the indeterminacy of human life is the indeterminacy of the supplement – of technics, in his case, or of writing, as in Derrida's case – Lyotard argues that there is another indeterminacy to be found in the "familiar and unknown guest", in the the infant, that accompanies the human. Precisely in light of this question concerning the human debt to its beginning, one might wonder whether, despite his effort to think the birth of humankind, Stiegler does not forget to think the phenomenon of the birth of the human. In this respect, it is quite striking that Lyotard in his reading of Arendt argues that, despite some of the questions he has regarding her humanism, his idea of childhood or *enfance* has a strong resonance with Arendt's conception of birth and natality.[35] As he writes:

Birth is not merely the biological fact of parturition, but, under cover and on discovery of this fact, the event of a possible radical alteration in the course compelling things to repeat the same. Childhood [*Enfance*] is the name of this faculty, in that it brings to the world of being the astonishment of what, for a moment, is nothing yet – of what *is already* without yet being *something*.[36]

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[32] Lyotard, The Inhuman, p. 7.

[33] Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, Tübingen 1967[11], pp. 280–289.

[34] Jean-François Lyotard, Lectures d'enfance, Paris 1991, p. 67.

[35] Cf. "Survivant", in Lyotard, Lectures d'enfance, pp. 57–87; see especially pp. 66–67. Lyotard is careful to note that, although he embraces Arendt's notion of birth and natality, he is more hesitant concerning the humanist tendency in Arendt's conception of action as the human capacity to innovate (p. 69).

[36] Lyotard, Lectures d'enfance, p. 70. For the translation see, Jean-François Lyotard, "The Survivor," in Towards the Postmodern, edited and translated by Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts, New York 1999, p. 151.

Childhood, the human misery and poverty, and the initial delay of the human to enter humanity, thus not only "haunts discourse" but haunts the supplementary structure in which the human is placed but in which the human is always also out of place. One might perhaps say, with respect to Arendt, that the *faculté* of *enfance* is not to be understood out of the human capacity to act or to speak but rather out of its constitutive poverty and misery, i.e., its intrinsic weakness.[37]

3. Hermeneutics and Humanism

Stiegler, as we noted above, introduces a differentiation in the meaning of technics – a distinction between the poisonous and medicinal side of τέχνη – for which the Derridean notion of φάρμακον does not seem to offer the proper means. By emphasizing the dimension of the infant, Lyotard points out that the native lack constitutive of the human and exemplified by the infant might offer a resource for thinking the distinction that Stiegler needs in order to find an alternative to the mere disorientation of modern technology. In order to show how this indeed leads in Lyotard to such a distinction – although perhaps not so much by invoking the sense of the πολιτική τέχνη, let me return briefly to the beginning, to the notions of *Anstoß* and *Wagnis* in Heidegger.

In another important text in which Heidegger also problematizes the understanding of the human as ζῷον λόγον ἔχον, namely *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, he famously turns to the first choir of Sophocles' Antigone to interpret the human in terms of δεινόν and its related terms. He translates these terms with the notion of *das Unheimliche* by which the human appears as *das Unheimlichste*, the most uncanny.[38] In light of what we discussed in relation to Stiegler and Lyotard, it is interesting to see that in Heidegger's quest for an alternative notion of the human also compels him to bring into play the notions of *Machenschaft* and *techne*.[39] He then writes the following concerning the human:

[37] For the quote, cf. Lyotard, Lectures d'enfance, p. 9.

[38] Martin Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, Gesamtausgabe Band 40, Frankfurt am Main 1983, pp. 150, 157 ff. In this context, Derrida speaks here of Heidegger's "suspicion" of this definition of the human, see Jacques Derrida, Sovereignties in Question. The Poetics of Paul Celan, ed. and tr. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, New York 2005, p. 1264.

[39] Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, p. 168.

Der *Gewalt-tätige*, der Schaffende, der in das Un-gesagte ausrückt, in das Un-gedachte einbricht, der das Ungeschehene erzwingt und das Ungeschaute erscheinen macht, dieser Gewalt-tätige steht jederzeit im Wagnis (τόλμα, v. 371).[40]

Here, the human *Wagnis* concerns the inescapable risk attached to the chance of letting something – and in particular the human being – appear. This risk is developed and rethought by Stiegler and Lyotard. More importantly, at this moment, when bringing into play the Greek understanding of τέχνη in *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Heidegger offers a crucial distinction between technics or technology on the one hand, and art (*Kunst*) on the other. In light of the astral epoch, such a distinction is essential, although one might, for all kinds of reasons, try to problematize this distinction.[41]

It is this distinction that Lyotard reiterates in his own way when addressing the possibility (or impossibility) of bringing the dimension of childhood to language. He reiterates the Heideggerian distinction because he captures the specific hermeneutic problem with which the notion of *enfance* goes hand in hand. How can something that cannot speak be brought to language as if it says something or wants to say something? Lyotard is aware that what cannot speak cannot simply be determined as what cannot *yet* speak. Even if we say of the infant that he or she cannot *yet* speak, we do not mean to say that, when the child grows up and learns to speak he or she would be able, afterwards, to speak of his or her own infancy.[42] Therefore, another distinction needs to be made in the realm of discourse and in the realm of the institutions so that in this realm childhood might be traced, so that what "haunts discourse" is *attested to* in discourse – even if this means to attest to an absence of attestation (since the infant cannot speak). As he notes in the introduction to The Inhuman, the dimension of infancy is somehow at work in or inspires "what, in our civilization at least, passes as institutional: literature, the arts, philosophy". He continues: "There too, it is a matter of traces of an indetermination, a childhood, persisting up to the age of adulthood."[43] These particular types of discourse or institution – of "writing, thinking, literature, arts" – are therefore entrusted with the task "to venture to bear witness to [infancy]." Whereas the institutions represent the first form of inhumanity, Lyotard adds a difference – comparable to the differ-

[40] Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, p. 170.

[41] For instance, what to make of the peculiar distinction Heidegger introduces when arguing: *Kunst ist Wissen und deshalb τέχνη. Die Kunst ist nicht deshalb τέχνη, weil zu ihrem Vollbringen 'technische' Fertigkeiten, Werkzeuge und Werkstoffe gehören*. Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, p. 169.

[42] At this point, I follow Visker's clear analysis, cf. Rudi Visker, The Inhuman Condition. Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger, Dordrecht 2004, p. 269.

[43] Lyotard, The Inhuman, p. 3.

ence between technics and art in Heidegger's reinterpretation of τέχνη – to locate or to situate in the arts the capacity to bear witness to this childhood, to bear witness to an incapacity to speak (or as Lyotard sometimes writes, to "say that we cannot say it"[44]).

Childhood is thus the resource by which discourse transforms into bearing witness. It is the task of this hermeneutic figure of bearing witness to remember the constitutive poverty and impotentiality of the human as the very resource of things possible, but also as the resource of what gives to think and what gives to speak. Although it may be true that λόγος and φωνή belong to the τέχναι, the answer to the question of why the human should use these skills cannot be merely found in τέχνη itself but refers us to this desire for potentialities and possibilities that marks the native lack of the human. Perhaps, to put it in other words, if one asks the question of what makes us speak and what makes us think, part of the answer goes as follows: one speaks because one is addressed, because one is asked to respond and because one is taken up in an ongoing conversation. Yet, there is also another *Anstoß* to come to speak and another *Wagnis* to begin to speak in the first place, namely the risky venture to speak out of one's pain or struggle to support the institutions or to bring one's temptation to escape the institutions to language. In these forms of speaking, the possibilities that have not been actualized but were nevertheless given in the poverty and impotentiality of childhood are brought to language. It is the hermeneutic struggle of the arts and of philosophy to disentangle from the ongoing discourses to bear witness to this reserve or remainder of the infant that makes them speak in the first place.

Summary

Humanism has been challenged from different sides in the last century. This essay discusses two important critiques of humanism that have been developed in the wake of Martin Heidegger's *Letter on "Humanism"*, namely that of Bernard Stiegler and Jean-François Lyotard. Both authors argue that the human is marked by a twofold non- or pre-human dimension, namely a native lack of the human, which Stiegler understands as the human defect and which Lyotard understands in terms of the notion of *enfance* or childhood, and the capacity of the human to supplement this lack, which Stiegler understands in terms of technics and technology and which Lyotard understands in terms of the human capacity to be educated and integrated in institutions, discourses, and so on. This essay shows in which sense the positions of Stiegler and Lyotard are complementary and, in particular, how Lyotard's reflections on childhood might offer a sense of resource that Stiegler aims to find in technics, but seems unable to.

[44] Lyotard, The Inhuman, p. 7. Quoted in Visker, The Inhuman Condition, p. 276.

Zusammenfassung

Der Humanismus ist im letzten Jahrhundert von verschiedenen Seiten kritisiert worden. In diesem Artikel werden zwei wichtige Ansätze untersucht, nämlich diejenigen von Bernard Stiegler und Jean-François Lyotard, die beide Heideggers Überlegungen über den Humanismus weiterentwickeln. Beide versuchen zu zeigen, dass der Mensch in zweifacher Weise von einer „nicht-menschlichen" oder „prä-humanen" Dimension bestimmt ist. Erstens gibt es die Dimension des geburtlichen Mangels, die Stiegler als das menschliche Defizit versteht und Lyotard als *enfance* oder Kindheit bezeichnet. Zweitens gibt es die Dimension, in der dieser Mangel ausgeglichen wird, was Stiegler mit dem Vermögen der Technik verbindet und Lyotard mit Bildung als Eingliederung in Institutionen. In diesem Artikel wird darüber hinaus gezeigt, inwieweit die Ansichten von Stiegler und Lyotard als komplementär gelten können und insbesondere wie Lyotards Beschreibungen der Kindheit dabei helfen können, zwischen einer zerstörerischen und einer integrierenden Technik zu unterscheiden, was Stiegler offenkundig nicht vermag.